Kino no Tabi Volume10

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These are the novel illustrations that were included in volume 10

キノの旅
—the Beautiful World— X

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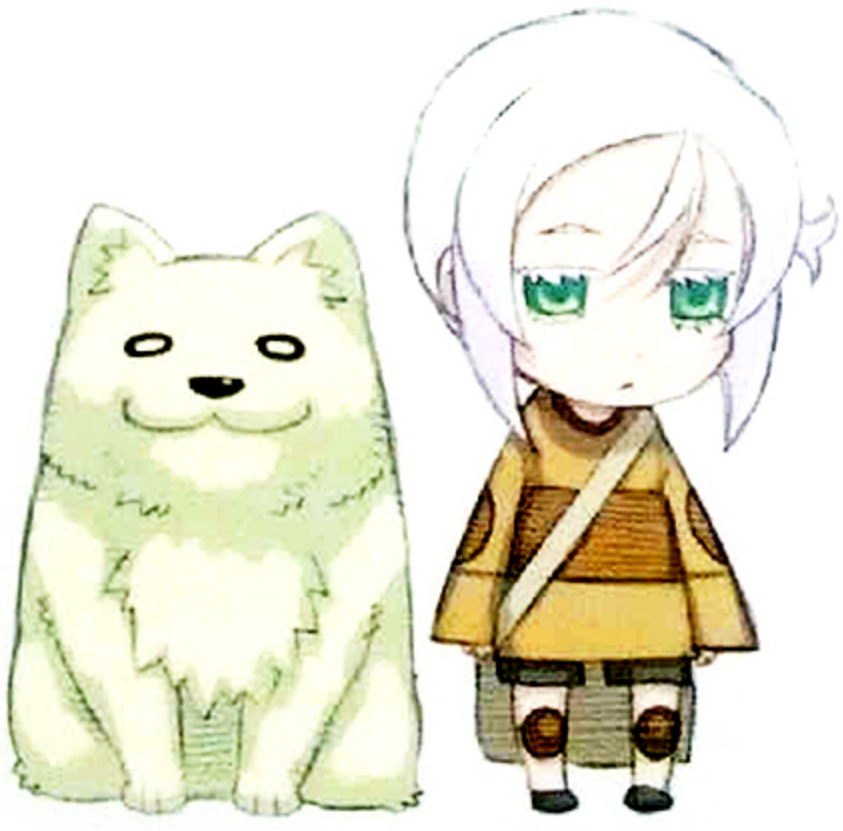

キノの旅 X

the Beautiful World

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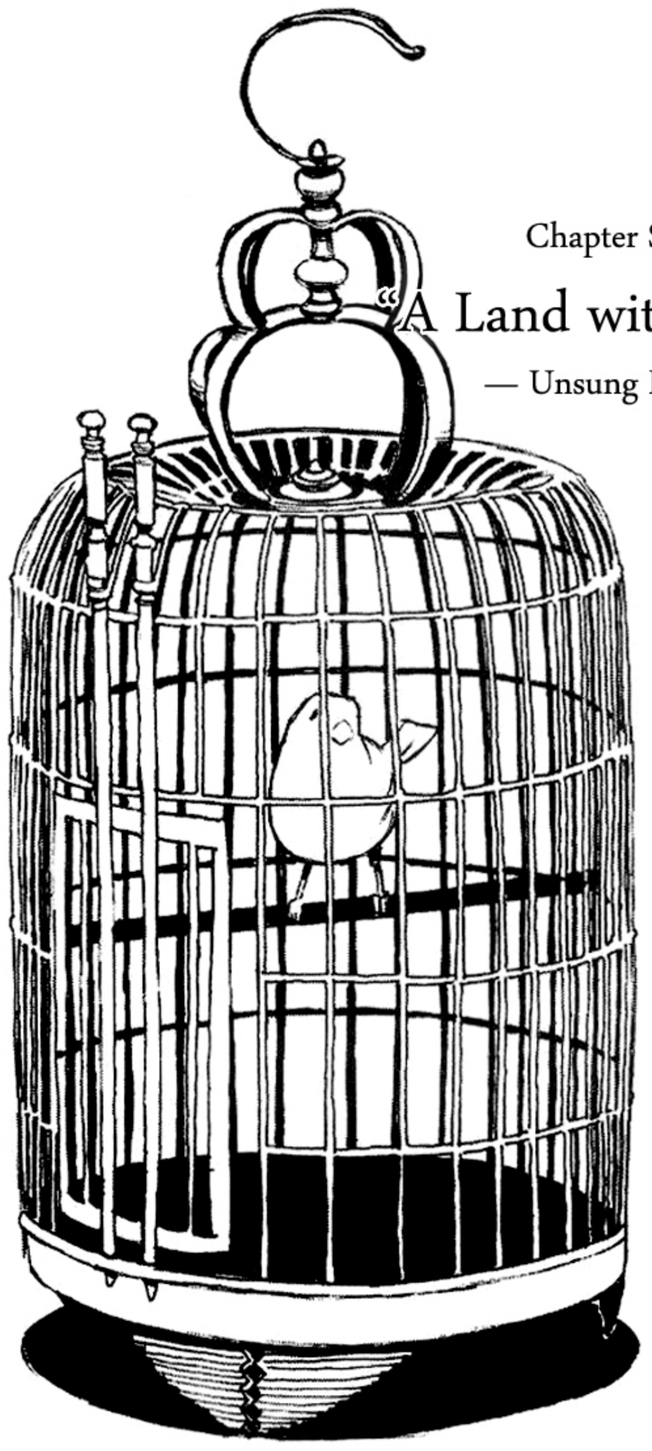
THE CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY

Interests shapes justice

Justice generates interests

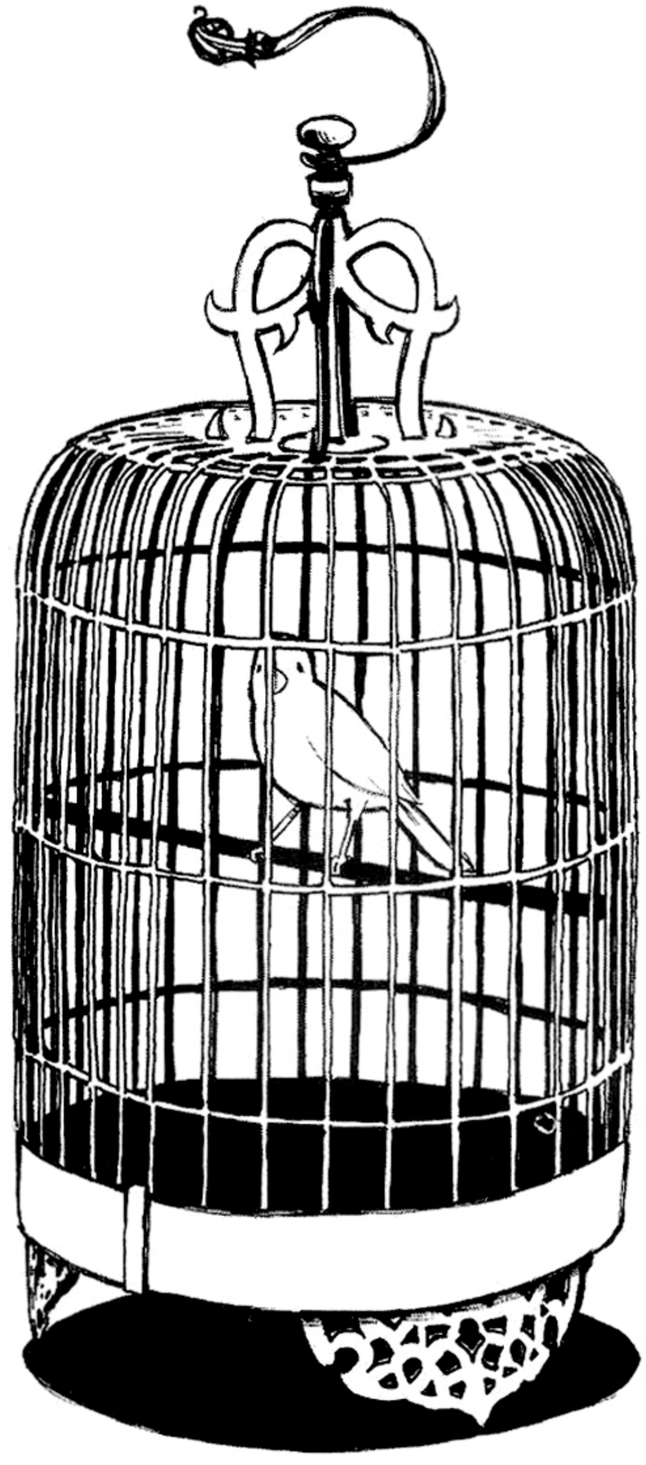
— How Much is Your Justice? —

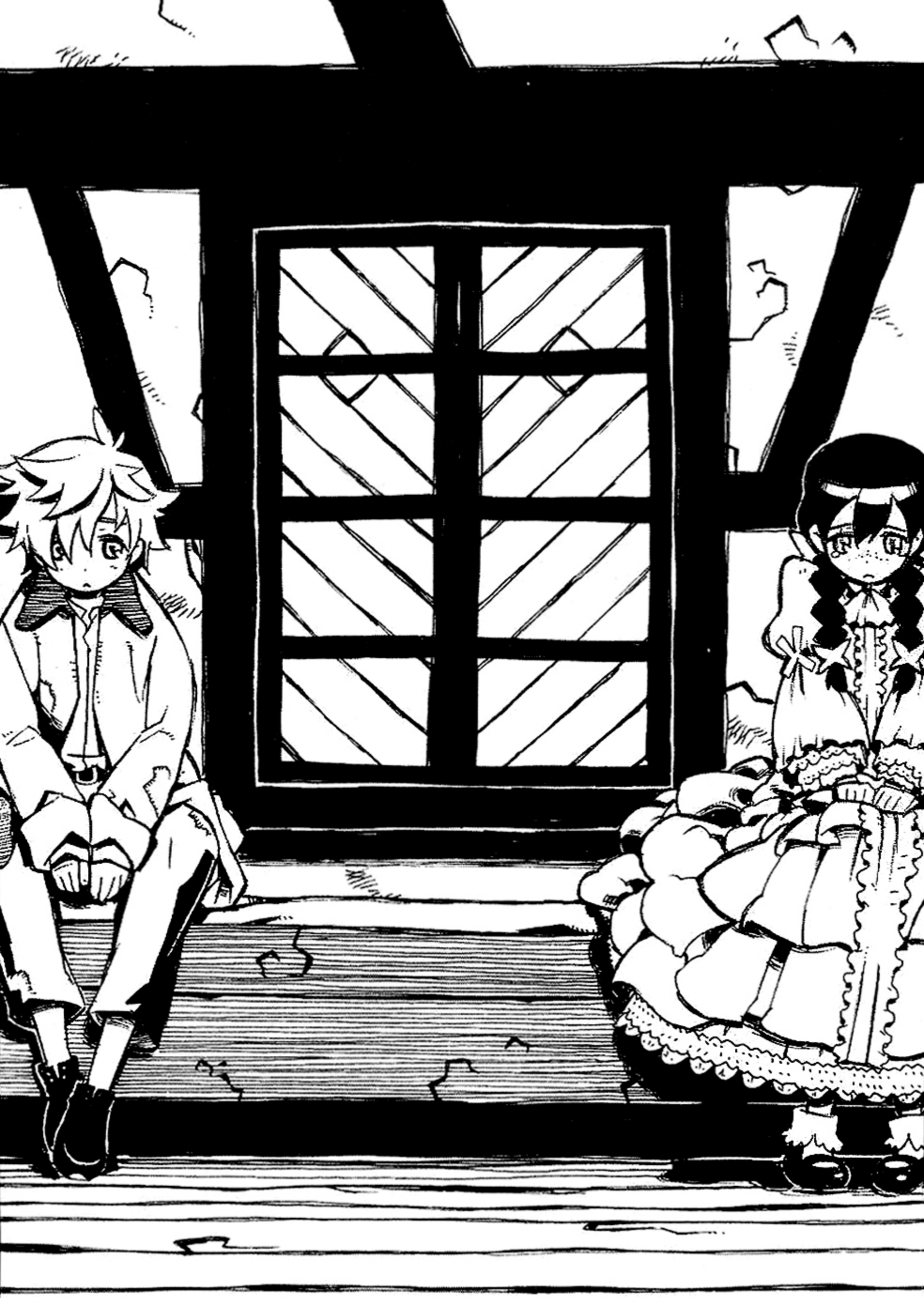


Chapter Seven

"A Land with a Diva"

— Unsung Divas —





“Land of Pets” —apPETite—

Frontispiece

"Land of Pets"

— apPETite —

One autumn day, Kino and Hermes arrived at a certain country.

The country's walls surrounded a not too wide, level terrain lined up with many multi-storied houses crowded together. A lot of people lived in it. As soon as Kino entered the country, she noticed that all of the citizens have some sort of animal with them, without exception.

A person walking with a leashed dog. A person holding a cat in his arms. A person carrying a birdcage with a parrot inside. A person with a weasel on top of his head. A person strutting by the road on a horse.

"They look like…pets," Hermes said.

"Yeah…," Kino replied with a look of surprise.

Kino leisurely rode Hermes downtown. Lined up in the country's main street were all sorts of shops selling items related to pets—veterinary clinics, parlors, and the like. They were everywhere.

Even the interior of the hotel referred to them by the gate sentry was full of animals. There were more

restrooms for different type of animals than that for humans.

"That's right. In our country, the citizens have an obligation to keep pets," the hotel boy said.

"Obligation?"

"Yes. All healthy citizens over ten years of age shall learn how to raise pets at home and at school. Any animal will do as long as it is registered as an acceptable pet by our Pet Regulations Committee."

"Why?" Hermes asked.

"Well, to say in a word, 'heart'. We have a duty to take care of a life. Because of this, we can cultivate a sense of responsibility or a feeling of duty, as well as generosity and kindness in everyone."

"You mean—"

"'Cultivation of aesthetic sensibility'?" Hermes said.

"That's correct! You sure are very knowledgeable, mister motorrad," the boy said in delight. Kino shot Hermes a mystified glance. Then the boy added,

"That is why every single person in our country is a vegetarian. You see, we can't just eat an animal that is considered a pet by someone."

—

The next day, Kino and Hermes rode all around the country for sightseeing.

Breeding houses for each and every kind of pet. Pet shows. Classes on pet-keeping. Therapeutic sessions for people who were depressed after losing their pets, and so on.

"What are your thoughts?" Hermes asked.

"It was completely different from the rumors…," Kino answered.

"Isn't it? Were you tricked again Kino?"

"What do you mean by 'again'?"

In the evening, several men were waiting for Kino and Hermes to return. They introduced themselves as officials of the Pet Regulations Committee, and asked for Kino's impressions about the country.

"Our country has a gift for you, Miss Kino."

"What is it?"

"As a remembrance for entering our country, we will present you with one animal of your choice. Of course, we won't force you if you don't want to, but how about it ? Won't you take a lovable pet to remember our country by, and also to serve as your personal stabilizer? It will be prepared by tomorrow."

—

The next day, the noon of the third day since they entered the country.

Kino finished the necessary arrangements and arrived at the gates for departure.

At the gates, the animal Kino requested the previous evening was inside a cage. It was a chicken.

"Thank you very much. I was taught how to raise it yesterday," Kino expressed her thanks as she received it.

"Please cherish it," the guard and the government official said in chorus.

—

Upon departure, while running leisurely through the forest road,

"It's just as the rumors say…," Kino said.

"I see now. So there *really* is something like it," Hermes said. On top of the bag on his carrier, there was the sleeping bag and the birdcage.

That evening.

Kino camped inside the forest. Her dinner was juicy chicken barbecue, its belly stuffed with spices prepared in the country.

"There truly is one. A country that gives travelers food for free."

“Ti’s Wish” —Get Real!—

Frontispiece

"Ti's Wish"

— Get Real! —

My name is Riku. I am a dog.

I have long, fluffy white fur. I always look like I'm smiling, but it does not necessarily mean that I am. I was just born that way.

Lord Shizu is my master. He is a young man who always wears a green sweater, lost his hometown in some complicated way, and is currently traveling via buggy.

Our companion is Ti. She is a quiet girl who is fond of hand grenades, lost her hometown in some complicated way, and became a part of us.

We emerged through a field of waving summer grass, and by the time we got to the country, they were holding festivities.

It was an annual celebration for the harvest, so the people there were excited. Lord Shizu went off to find some sort of town hall to get permission to stay and see if the place met his qualifications for permanent residence. Aside that, it was merrymaking as far as the eye could see.

Ti and I walked on the main street. There was a drawing of a figure on a huge brick building on whose body were pasted many metal sheets, making it a plate of armor. Each sheet had writing in charcoal.

We listened to the people talk and managed to gather that they wrote their wish on these sheets. Putting up the wish during the festival would make it come true, it seemed.

Looking up, there were hopes from—

"I hope I get a raise," "I hope my crops flourish next year, too," "I hope my grades improve,"

—to—

"I wish for good health for my family," "I wish for a healthy baby," "I hope he loves me, too."

Etc., etc. They were all modest yet selfish wishes.

"Well, now—travelers? Here's a sheet. Write a wish."

Lord Shizu passed off that privilege to Ti. I suggested that he wish to find a country that would accept us, but —

"I'd rather act than wish."

So he said, leaving Ti and me here to find someone who could tell him about immigration in this country.

"…"

Charcoal and metal sheet in her hands, I explained to a blank Ti that she was to use them to write a wish. Then I asked if she could write.

"…"

Silent, she began writing. I suppose that was my answer.

Gripping the charcoal, Ti wrote her wish in splendid letters:

"I hope everyone's wishes come true."

I was genuinely shocked. It was the most excellent thing I had ever seen out of her.

"…"

The silent Ti handed the sheet over to a countryman.

"Ohh, this is marvelous!"

The middle-aged man smiled broadly and handed it to the person in charge of mounting them. He too commented the same and began climbing the ladder.

Ti's wish was pasted up and became another scale in the armor.

I looked up at Ti and said, "That was a very kind and wonderful wish, but what was the reason for it? Could you tell me?"

I thought that she would say nothing, but then she dropped her gaze to mine and replied.

"Because it will not work anyway."

—

Lord Shizu returned. It seemed immigration was not possible.

“A Certain Man’s Journey · b” —Life is a Journey, and Vice Versa. · b—

Prologue

“A Certain Man’s Journey · b”

— Life is a Journey, and Vice Versa · b —

At the end of the short recess—

The man mounted the horse again.

He thanked the old woman and the young girl courteously—

And then looked ahead—

Slowly advancing on the straight road into the forest.

He returned to his journey.

Under the blue sky, as the man's figure became smaller and smaller,

"Will there be a time when his journey ends?"

The girl asked the old lady.

"Of course."

She replied right away.

The girl raised her face and looked at the old lady standing beside her.

She lowered her face to meet the girl’s gaze.

“There’s no such thing as a journey that doesn’t end.”

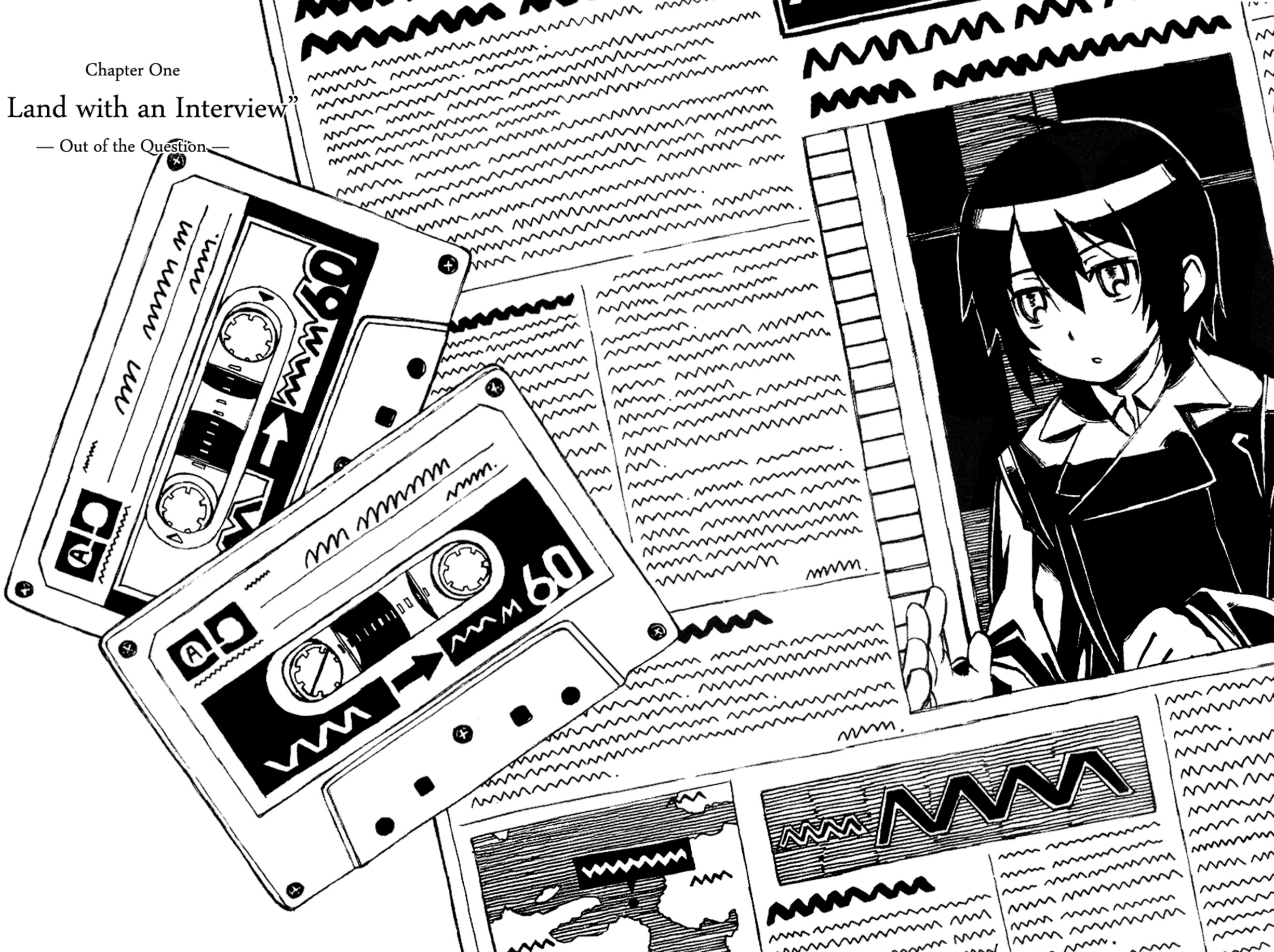
“Interview Land” —Out of the Question—

Translated by Untuned-Strings here

Chapter One

“A Land with an Interview”

— Out of the Question —



“A Tale of Braggarts” —Fantasy—

Chapter Two

“A Tale of Braggarts”

— Fantasy —

This story takes place in the dining hall of a hotel of a country.

The dining hall took up the first floor of the wooden building. The floors were paneled with wood, the walls likewise, and wide beams crossed the high ceiling.

Between each beam, as well as between the beam and the wall, hung thick ropes.

They were the kind you could find on sailing vessels. Tens dangled low enough to touch a person's head.

About twenty round tables were arranged on the floor. Only one had chairs, and it was there where four travelers had gathered.

All of them just came into the country that day.

One was a man in his fifties, traveling by coach.

One was a woman in her thirties going around in a four-wheel drive.

One was a youth in his twenties who befriended the woman and got a ride, but otherwise went on foot.

The last was a short-haired teenager with a large revolver hung by the hip who rode a motorrad. (Note: A two-wheeled vehicle. Only denotes that it doesn't fly.)

After the four took their meals, they had their usual information exchange as they sipped tea. No other customers were present. Even the bartender was not at the back counter. And then,

"There're travelers here!"

The residents gathered round, talking loudly. All at once, some thirty people crowded around the surprised guests.

After exchanging simple greetings, one countryman said this.

"Say, travelers. When you guys say stuff like, 'These are the places I've seen up until now' and people don't believe you because they've got no way of checking the facts, you end up having to lie to satisfy them, right? So how about it? Tell us what kind of lies you make up when that happens. Something very imaginative, full of strange things that aren't possible in reality—we'd like to hear those."

This surprised the travelers, but if you were told that the meals would be free of charge if each one shared such a story, how could you keep quiet?

—

The old man spoke.

"This, I once saw. In one country, everybody was a tub of lard—so obese that you'd think they weren't human. Beauty and fat went hand-in-hand in their minds, I suppose, but anyhow, they pigged out every day. Obesity-related diseases manifested one after the other in them, but they didn't care one bit. And when they finally got to the point where they can't walk anymore, they were hailed as 'saints', taken care of by someone, and led a life wholly devoted to eating until death. Body weight always exceeded 300 kg. The sheer load causes the flesh to separate from the bone, so that's how they can't move. Such things can't be called human."

The woman spoke.

"The country that surprised me the most would have to be this one. Its custom was to lop off a baby's arm or leg once it was born. They considered having a full set of limbs too perfect and how 'it wasn't beautiful for a human' so they simply cut one off. They were even selling tools for that. Of course, that meant everyone there was missing an arm or a leg, and since it was their standard of beauty all this time, wherever I went, they always asked me with a frown, 'Aren't you ashamed to have all of your arms and legs?' And eventually they got this close to cutting something off of me, so I shot off."

The youth spoke.

"The one I went to was amazing. They had a law called the Middle Age Act. It says that if middle-aged people—adults who've developed their judgment—commit a crime, they're innocent. As long as they agree to some simple reformation, they won't be put in jail. It seems that their justification is this: 'For such sensible adults to have committed the crime, they surely must have had no choice at the time. Hence, they cannot be charged with the crime.' So there was a proverb like this in that country: 'If you're going to commit a crime, wait until middle age.' Of course, most of the adults there were normal, but outrageous crimes cropped up every so often and gave me the creeps. I left pretty soon."

—

The motorrad rider spoke.

"I once saw an entire land moving. It was about the size of this country we're in, though beneath the huge walls were millions of caterpillars that never stopped moving. The people lived above them and traveled

leisurely like that. When I got on, there was another country blocking its way, but the moving country used high-power lasers that burned through the walls like paper and reflected every missile that came its way, so it went on in a matter of minutes. Even now, I believe that country must be wandering somewhere."

—

The stories were finished.

The stories highly amused the residents, whose eyes opened wide, laughed and exclaimed, "There's no way that could ever be real!"

So they thanked the travelers for the good time. 'We'll go pay the meal costs now, and the morning is nigh, so we'll be taking off,' they said.

Just like the way they came, they left in an instant.

The four sat there all alone. To break the sudden silence in the dining hall, the old man spoke.

"Everyone— You thought that thinking up of a lie was too much trouble, and ended up telling your real experiences in the places you visited, didn't you?"

The other three nodded. As they stared at the old man,

"Yeah. So did I."

He matter-of-factly confessed the same. And then,

"Although the places we spoke of earlier were shocking…"

The three nodded. Then all four looked up at the hanging ropes.

"This country is quite amazing itself."

And the three firmly nodded to the old man's murmur .

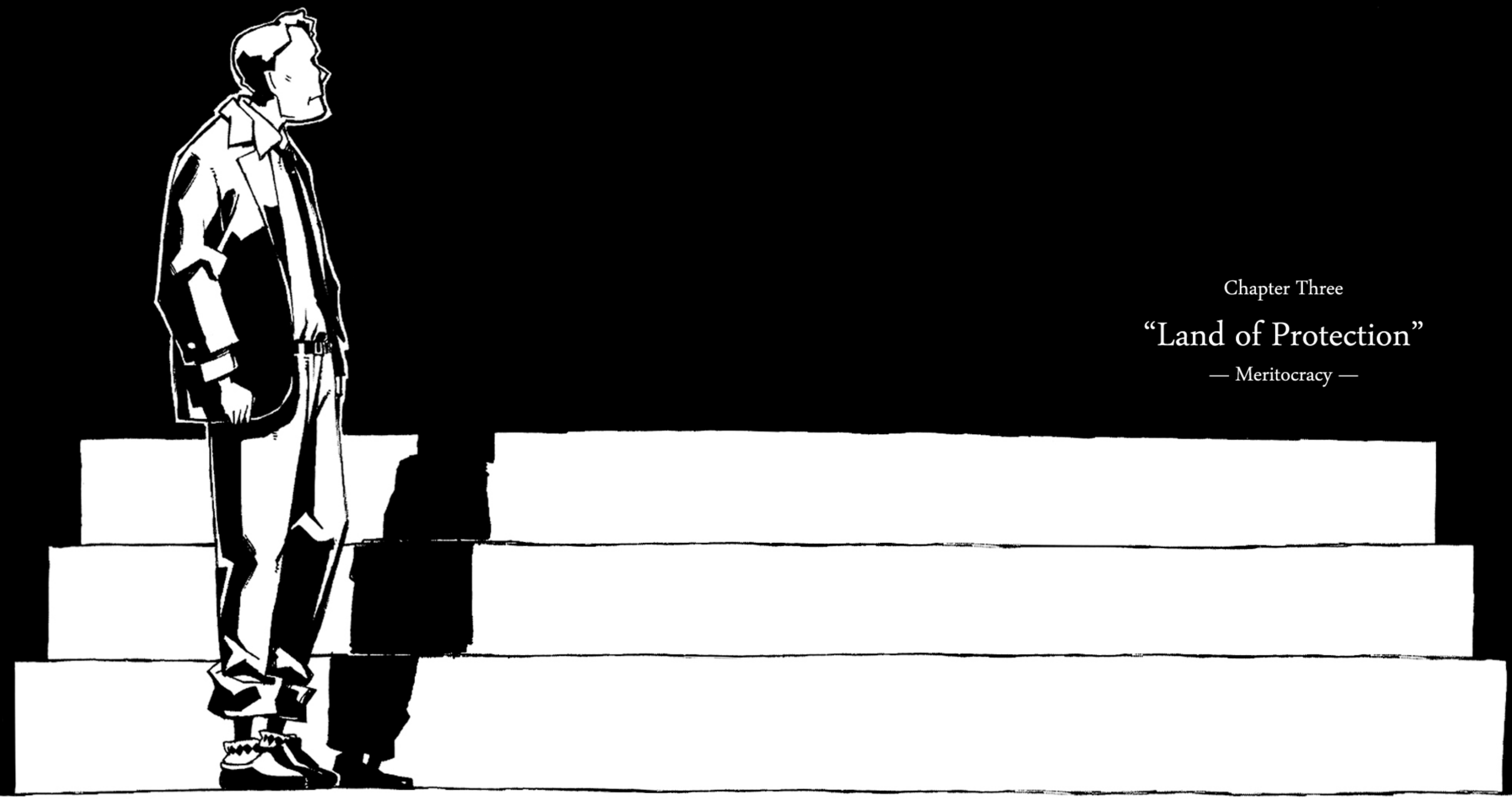
For the residents who had just been there were dangling upside-down from the ropes. All four continued staring up at the ropes.

At the bar counter, the bartender too hung upended from the rope tied to his knee.

“Would you like seconds?”

And asked this as he polished a glass.

“Land of Protection” —Meritocracy—



Chapter Three

“Land of Protection”

— Meritocracy —

One summer, there was a tiny car running on a prairie.

It was flat all around as far as the eye could see. The flowering plants danced comfortably with the wind, and there were but a few trees. The clouds scattered in the sky sparkled a bright orange from the glow of the evening sun.

The vehicle that made its way through this plain was a very tiny, yellow rundown car. One would think that its exhaust pipe, which spouted black fumes and rattled with each bump on the rough road, could fall off at any moment. Through its cracked side mirror, the rust-colored and fragmented corners of the car's hood could be seen.

Nevertheless, the car ran with all its might through the enormous grassland.

As it was summer, the air was warm in itself. But the climate in these parts was not humid, so crossing this place was not a grueling task. The man seated in the driver's seat, as well as the woman in the left-hand passenger seat enjoyed the gentle wind coming in through the window, their shirt collars swaying with the breeze.

While keeping one hand on the steering wheel, the slightly short but handsome young man in the driver's seat spoke to the woman beside him, "Master, don't you want to rest? Once we get to the country, that is."

The woman with long black hair, the one who the man referred to as Master, returned a question without looking back at the man.

"And what do you mean by 'rest'?"

"Why, just as it says on the tin. We'll take a break from work and spend our time in the country relaxing. With that gem we got from the trader, we don't have to worry about food expenses for a while."

The woman did not say anything, but did not seem to be against the idea either.

"I would also like to savor three delicious meals a day for once."

At the same time as the man's words, the walls appeared from the bottom of the horizon.

The car feebly made its way to the walls. On both sides of the road, they could see something moving.

The man slowed down the car. The things that stirred in the meadows were animals.

It was around sixty centimeters in length. At a glance, it seemed to be a penguin, having the appearance of a bird that walks, but it had two arms like that of a monkey.

Its color was a mottled brown and cream, with fur like that of a cat and tail like that of a dog. Its face resembled a tiny bear, with its nose right in between its beady eyes.

"Oh, it's my first time seeing something like that," the man said. The woman remained silent, but poked her head out of the car and looked at the animal.

While being watched by around thirty such creatures, the car disappeared beyond the gates.

The place the two arrived in was neither big nor small. Its main industry was agriculture, and as it has no nearby enemies, it was a rather laid-back country.

Upon entering the country, the pair sold the gem and checked-in at a splendid hotel. After taking a long-awaited shower, they ate delicious food and spent their time relaxing.

The next day, while they were having their late breakfast in a sparsely occupied restaurant, an animal came in.

It was the same kind of animal that they saw outside the country. However, its color was slightly different; it was a mottled black and brown and had a more striking appearance.

This creature walked in brisk, small steps with its two legs. It approached the table where the two travelers were having their meal.

"So they can also be found inside the country. I wonder if it's a pet?" the man asked.

"I don't know," the woman answered without much interest while she drank her tea.

The animal came up to the side of the man and hopped up. It landed on the table with its feet, then fixed its glittering gaze on the cream-filled pastry that the man picked up to eat.

"No, you don't dare." The man raised his right hand to drive it away when,

"Ah! Stop, traveler!"

The man suddenly stopped his hand on the waiter's shout. The woman, her lips still on her cup, lifted her gaze.

And at that moment,

"Kyokyokyokyukyo"

The animal uttered these sounds, then jumped away after nimbly grabbing the pastry from the man's hand. It started to eat the pastry, smearing its face with cream.

"Ah!"

It gobbled up the pastry while the man held his mouth open in disbelief. The waiter ran quickly towards them.

"Traveler, you mustn't lay a finger on that animal."

"Why?"

"Because we have a law that protects it."

The waiter explained that this animal used to thrive in these areas. However, when people started to live in this country, its population dropped due to excessive hunting .

And just before it became extinct, the country passed a law to protect it. They gave it food, and soon its population grew.

To prevent its extinction, a law was passed forbidding everyone, without exception, from harming it. And so, no matter what it did, the people had no excuse to hurt it.

Even during the explanation, the animal indulged itself with the man's share of the pastries, and at last when it has finished eating up everything,

"Kyokyakyakyukyukyukya?"

It opened its cream-smudged mouth and vocalized what seemed like a question. The man and the waiter remained mute, having no idea what it was trying to say.

The animal then looked at the woman's plate. There was one more delicious-looking pastry left in it.

"Kyokyukyakyukyoo. Kyukyukyo"

The animal yammered, and stretched its hand towards the plate.

"Kyukya?"

Just before it snatched the pastry, it met gazes with the woman who was staring it down.

"Kyuki-…"

The animal averted its eyes.

And then it jumped off and ran to a different table at the other side of the room. It also climbed up and started to wolf down a barely-eaten pancake of one customer.

The middle-aged man let out a deep sigh, and stood up from his seat. He abandoned his half-eaten meal, and went out of the restaurant.

"It's just as you see. In this country, you can't hurt this animal. If you wounded this animal by chance, you will have to serve five years in jail, even if you are a traveler. If you killed it, you will have to face a life sentence. Be careful."

"Wow."

The man was in shock. And as he was not able to taste the pastry, he ordered one more from the waiter. However,

"I'm very sorry, but it's sold out."

The waiter bowed and left.

When the man saw the woman eating her share of the pastry,

"Can I have half, please?"

"No."

The woman replied coldly.

—

After that, the pair came out for a stroll and looked around the country.

"Anyway, that's one menace of an animal."

Just as the man said, the animals all over the place behaved outrageously as if there was no one around.

One group crossed the street, causing the cars and carriages to stop. Another skillfully climbed a wall and threw away the hung laundry. Some ate and laid waste to the fruits in front of a store. And some left footprints on a table that was just cleaned. They scattered droppings just about everywhere, destroyed crops, and played with those that cannot be eaten.

There weren't really much of them, but they're not particularly rare, as they could be seen just about everywhere.

According to the citizens, perhaps because of recent success in breeding, their numbers have suddenly increased.

And then a few animals came and flocked around the strolling pair. However,

"Do you need something?"

The group left as soon as they met eyes with the woman. Then they set their sights on a girl walking on the other side of the street. They snatched the little girl's bag and chucked it in the middle of the road. A truck passed and ran over it.

"How terrible… After being able to buy it at last…"

Seeing the flattened bag, the girl cried in anguish.

"Kyukyakyaakyukyo!" "Kyu-kyokyu!" "Kyakyukyokya!"

The animals cried out, as if they were laughing in glee.

"They choose their opponents wisely. Pretty smart, eh, " the man said.

That evening.

As the two relaxed in the hotel's lobby, the middle-aged man who managed the hotel came to greet them. He gave a warm welcome to the travelers, who rarely come to their country, and served them some tea.

When the travelers told him that they planned to leave the next morning,

"This is a good country, so please come again," he invited.

The woman talked about a traveler who once stayed in the hotel. It was a story from a long time ago, when this magnificent building was yet to be built. The owner pointed to a picture hanging from a very high place in the lobby.

It was an old-looking, black and white picture showing a young couple smiling brightly in front of a

small building. The owner explained that it was a photo of his parents.

Several decades ago, his parents built a small inn in this country, and it has since then became a magnificent hotel. It was evident that he was very proud of it.

"That's the only picture I have of them. It's this hotel's treasure."

"I see it's very important to you," the woman said.

"Yes. That's why I placed it in such a high place. I would really like to display it on top of the fireplace where it could be seen very well, but the circumstances in this country is not so favorable for that, you see," the owner said with an intricate expression.

—

The next morning,

An incident occurred while the travelers were having their breakfast.

“Ah! Stop! Stop it!”

A man’s scream was heard from the lobby.

The male traveler raised his eyebrow, and several guests went to the lobby out of worry.

“That’s the owner wasn’t it?” the woman said, and stood as she wiped her mouth. The man also hurried to the lobby.

What they saw there was,

“Stop!”

The screaming owner, and

“Kyakyu!” “Kyakyakyu!” “Kyakyuukyukyokya”

Three creatures that were happily stomping on something.

“Kyukya!”

"Kyukyukyo!"

"Kyu-kyukyukyu!"

What the animals continued to stomp on, while they grunted as if conversing with each other, was the photo of the owner's parents, which should have been hanging from a high place.

The animals trampled on the picture frame, and as if that was not enough, they stepped on the picture and dirtied it with their drool and droppings.

"…"

The owner sank down to the floor right in front of them, and could only stare at the treasured picture that has turned into a sloppy mess.

"How come?"

The man tilted his head and looked at the wall where the picture hung. Then he noticed three long poles leaning against it.

"Oh dear…"

The female workers in the lobby told them that the animals came carrying those poles, propped them against the wall to climb up, and dropped the picture.

"Kya-kyukyaa!" "Kyukyokyuu!" "Kya!"

While the animals happily wrecked the photo,

"Ah…"

The guests could only look on silently at the owner who knelt before the scene as his eyes became flooded with tears.

"Kyakya?"

One of the animals trotted with its dirty feet to the guests, who drew back. They were grinding their teeth in frustration, but no one had the nerve to lay their hands on it.

"This country's kings, huh?" the man muttered.

Soon this animal scampered in front of the woman. But it did not approach any more than necessary.

"Kya-kyakyu!"

It voiced out, and jumped up several times before returning to its fellow creatures still standing on the picture.

"Kyakyuu!" "Kyakyu!" "Kyaakyukya!"

The picture, which had no hope of getting mended, was further shred to pieces with the animals' feet. The animals danced around as if in celebration.

And at that moment.

Bam.

A staggering roar shook the lobby.

All humans present except for one almost jumped in surprise. Likewise, all animals save for one almost jumped in surprise.

The lone person was the woman who had her smoking revolver poised by her waist.

And the lone animal was the one who received the bullet in its chest, blown away by a few meters, and collapsed with its face up. Blood spurted from its wound, and it has stopped moving except for a faint twitch. It

was the animal that, only moments ago, mocked the woman.

"And here we go."

The man mumbled to himself as he took out a slim automatic hand persuader (Note: A persuader is a gun. In this case, a pistol) with his left hand.

"Kyakyu?"

He switched on the laser sight, and the tiny circle of red light settled right in between its eyes.

Bang.

The animal flopped face up along with the firing sound that was much quieter than the first one.

Right before the dumbfounded guests and the only remaining animal.

"I'm sorry. My persuader fired by accident," was the woman's only explanation. The man also holstered his persuader and,

"Mine too. Oh, I'm really glad no one got hit."

"T-travelers… This is…outrageous…"

At last one of the guests was finally able to say something.

"What are you talking about?"

"W-what… You just killed an animal protected under our laws… That's a felony…"

"Animal?" The woman tilted her head innocently, and fixed her gaze at the two dead animals and the remaining animal frozen in shock. "Where is this animal you speak of?" she asked without hesitation.

A wave of comprehension swept the crowd.

"Where is this animal you speak of?"

She asked one more time.

"Yes, indeed…"

The owner stood up unsteadily.

"Kyu?"

"Everyone here… There's not a single animal here, is there?"

"Kyukikyo…"

The owner wiped off the tears as he stood up, and lifted a chair by his side.

"DIE!"

And hit the remaining animal with all his strength.

"Kya—"

There was a tiny shriek, and the unpleasant sound of several bones breaking.

—

For a while, the owner continued to cry in front of the ruined picture.

"Oh my."

The humans around gazed at the pair of travelers. The woman remained silent while the man only shrugged his shoulders.

Things like "What should we do?" or "Should we call the police?" could be heard among the crowd, but no one took initiative.

When the lobby has quietened down like a funeral service,

"Kyakyu?"

The door opened with a thud. Dozens of the animals entered the lobby. And upon seeing the corpses of their fellows,

"Kyakyu!" "Kyakyuu!" "Kyokyu!" "Kyaakyukyukyu!" "Kyakyu!"

They shouted out unanimously, and plunged themselves towards the humans.

Bam. Boom. Crack. Bang.

The pair of travelers pounded away like precision machinery. When the woman changed her magazine, the

man would cover for her. And she would do the same when the man ran out of bullets.

The lobby was soon filled with sounds of explosions. After all the noise has subsided, there was not a single animal left moving.

The woman once again addressed the speechless crowd, "Where are the animals?"

"T-that's right!" someone shouted. It was as if a switch was turned on.

"We have to protect the animals, but there's not one of them here!"

"Yes, yes! —There are no such animals in this country! "

"And there's no need to protect something that is not here!"

And everyone raised a cheer.

That day, the country experienced a day of celebration noisier than any they've had before.

"Have you seen any animals?"

"No, I haven't."

Such dialogue propagated like a wave throughout the country from the drop that originated in the hotel.

The citizens picked up bludgeons and farming tools.

"Kyakyuu!" "Gyokyu—"

And beat to death every single animal they could find.

At first the police considered doing something about it , but eventually, all of the citizens started doing the same thing, and they were forced to choose between arresting every single person in sight, or turn a blind eye to what they were doing.

"There aren't any animals here…right, officer?"

"Yeah…there's not one, inspector."

And such was their choice.

"Kyukyukyaa-!"

The whole day, angry bawls and shrieks were heard throughout the country.

The travelers also took part with their recurrent accidental firings that hit 'nothing'. And when they ran out of bullets, the stores gave them more for free.

And soon it was evening.

After being sent off with words of gratitude, the small, yellow car ran towards the gates.

There, the guard thanked them and invited them to come again. And the moment the car started to pass through the open gates,

"Kyakyuu!"

An animal hiding in the bushes jumped on the roof of the car.

"Ah! That basta— I don't see anything!" the guard exclaimed and considered thrusting his sword to the top of the car. However,

"We're leaving, so it's okay," the woman spoke, making the guard stop. At that moment, the car passed out of the gates.

"Well, since you're out of the country now… Please take care," the guard said before he returned to the gates.

"Master?"

The man in the driver's seat set his gaze on the animal clinging desperately, and perhaps trembling in fear, at the roof,

"Kyukyukyuu…"

The woman asked the man to drive for a while, and as told, he rode the tiny car into the prairie. Then they stopped.

The woman alighted from the car and talked to the animal on top of the roof.

"Please get off."

"Kyu-kyakyuu!"

"We can't take you with us."

"Kyukyukyu?"

"No."

With the woman's glare, the creature reluctantly jumped off the car's roof.

"Kyukyuu…"

"It seems that you've misunderstood things a little."

"Kyu?"

"'Protection' does not equate to 'power'. The ones who have real control in that country were its people, not you."

"Kyuu…"

"Now, go wherever you like."

The woman pointed her finger to the prairie. The animal looked in that direction.

And over there, he saw many other animals. A group of around twenty animals of various sizes put out their heads from the grasses and looked back at them. It was the same kind, with only the color and size being slightly different.

"Kyu-kyukyu…"

"Goodbye," the woman said and boarded the car and asked the driver to depart.

"Bye-bye," the man said, before launching the sluggish car.

As they rode through the prairie road,

"I see you have a kind side too, Master. I thought you were going to kill it immediately like before."

"No and no."

Having heard the word 'no' twice, the man tilted his head in confusion.

"Master?"

He looked at the woman who sat on the left-hand seat. The woman was smiling.

"I'm not *kind* at all. And there was no need for me to kill it immediately."

When the yellow car has left under the evening sun,

"Kyu-kyukyuu!"

The animal that was left behind looked at the group of animals.

"Gogagagagogaa" "Gogagagagago" "Gogogogogaga" "Goga-gagogaga!"

They communicated with domineering tones, and the lone creature replied,

"Kyoyu…"

And slightly drew back.

Then the one that seemed to be the boss of the group addressed it,

"Kyokyukyo?"

"Kyokyu-! Kyokyukyo-kyokyu!"

"Kyo-. Kyokyukyokyukyo"

Having said such, the boss turned back to its group.

"Gogagogogago!"

And spoke with a short yet mighty-sounding tone. Its peers tensed.

And then the boss,

"Kyokyukyo"

Spoke to the creature gently. It waved its hand, and invited it to come.

"Kyu! Kyuu—"

It replied happily, and approached the group. The group spread out and ushered in the newcomer.

And then,

"Gogagoo-!"

Within a moment, the boss began to beat up the lone creature together with everyone.

"Kyaakyuu! Kyakyuukyakyuu!"

The shrieks got louder, but they continued to beat it down without paying heed.

And soon, silence returned to the prairie.

“Land of Electric Poles” —Transmission—

Chapter Four

"Land of Electric Poles"

— Transmission —

Kino and Hermes were in a country.

Anywhere you were, you could see the border walls in the small, flat place. It was another one of those places with an alternating layout of houses and fields—a carefree scenery of a country just as carefree.

So that was how Kino was, cruising the place on Hermes under the warm sunlight when—

“Say, traveler. Would you like to have some tea and snacks with my family?”

She had no reason to refuse the passerby, so Kino let herself be treated.

Kino followed the countryman as she pushed Hermes along. She turned to enter the house grounds from the wide gravel road when—

“Oh, watch out there.”

He warned her. She stopped in her tracks and looked ahead, where a thick wire lay, stretching into the house.

“What is that?” she asked.

"Power lines," he responded, "to connect the houses together. If you touch it, you get electrocuted and may die, so one must always be careful."

"My, that's serious."

"But as long as you're careful, you're fine. Look at the end there."

Kino and Hermes followed the line until it terminated at a pillar. It was very tall and pointed at the tip. They went the other way and sure enough, there was a pillar there, too, set in a very firm foundation made of stone.

"Huh—that's true, you see these near lots of houses," Hermes commented.

Then Kino asked what they were.

"Electric poles," the countryman replied.

"Electric poles?"

"Yes, that's right. Actually, a traveler like you came here many years ago and passed on the knowledge to us. Just like I did now, I cautioned her about the wires in the ground, but then she said, 'Then just set up an electric

pole between the wires.' That was a brilliant idea. So we erected them up right away. Now whenever you see an electric pole, you know where the power lines are. No more need to look at the ground; 'Oh, there's an electric pole, so there must be power lines.' The number of people electrocuted dropped down drastically."

A few days after Kino and Hermes left.

"Ack…oh, no!" the countryman exclaimed. His neighbors asked him, 'What's wrong, what's the matter?'

"We loathe the birds that eat the biting lice—our religious figure. So we couldn't hang the electric wires up in the air because the birds will perch on them. And since we cannot put the wires underground because it is forbidden by law to dig in any place other than the farmland, we have no choice but to place them on top of the ground!" "Sure. What's the big deal?"

“I forgot to say that! To the traveler and motorrad who were here days ago! They probably think we’re idiots, now! Absolute nincompoops!”

“Well, that’s not a problem. Travelers are travelers. They might come back again, but the chance of them not coming again is very high.”

“And I’m telling you, we lost the chance to correct that ! What if they go to other countries and tell them about us? What if they all start thinking how stupid we must be ?”

“Like I said, don’t worry about it. We don’t know everything about that traveler either, let alone other countries.”

“That’s…true, but…”

“No worries, no worries. Now, it’s time for prayer. — O sacred, sacred biting louse, bless us with your gift.”

“In a Place Like This” — Preface —

Hey, Kino. Is there really a country here?”

Hermes asked Kino this while he ran.

“Dunno…”

She cocked her head as she replied.

Kino and Hermes were in a desert. The hard-packed white earth stretched from horizon to horizon, as far as the eye could see.

Clouds covered the sky without fail; a single white sheet. A white sky and a white earth. The farther you looked, the blurrier the distinction between the two. In such a blank world stood a lone motorrad.

Kino wore her yellow goggles and a bandana was wrapped around her face. She also had a long, brown coat on, with the excess of the long hem rolled up to her thighs.

“Whaddya mean, Miss Dunno?”

"Actually, I don't even know why I'm even driving here. It's strange."

"I knew it. Well, it's camel flag around here, I guess."

"…I think you mean camouflage."

"Yeah, that's it! —Nice work."

"Uhm, but… What is this 'camouflage' for?"

"If we go along further, we'll figure it out."

As Hermes said these things and made Kino tip her head again, she drove along. The scenery hardly changed , so it became even more doubtful whether they were moving at all. When some time passed in this manner,

"Ah…"

This was what Kino found.

It was a very big sign. Half-buried and slanting in the white desert. There were huge letters inscribed on it—

Kino stopped Hermes before the sign. She let down the kickstand and got off, wobbling over to it,

"Uuugh…"

And at length sunk down to her knees. On the sign was written thus:

"The afterword of Volume X begins here, so best regards."

'How can this be?' Kino muttered as she beat her gloved fists into the white desert.

"'So this was an afterword! —dammit, that blasted author did it after all!'"

So Hermes yelled enjoyably for and behind Kino. And then it whispered quietly.

"An afterword all of a sudden in the book—it's within the expectations of many readers, though. This is just one of them."

"Not only in the last volume but this one, too—how can he do this to a character?!"

Kino became angry, but we'll ignore that as the afterword begins.

—

Okay, so, the afterword.

As usual, no spoilers. Reading this before the subsequent stories in this book is fine, too.

So now Kino's gone up to X.

"Volume 10" is just one word, but since the year 2000 when the first volume went on sale, six years have passed. So if you've been reading since you were in sixth grade, you're a high school senior, now. Amazing. As for me, it's been a plentiful six years of experience and growth, I believe.

In all that time, Kino got a drama CD, an anime, video game, a signing at Entama, an anime movie in theaters, a speech on that stage, a signing in Taiwan, a second game—lots happened.

That a manuscript initially entered into the Dengeki Game Novel Prize came this far is because of the support of all of you, readers.

I am grateful once again as I reach this turning point of a tenth volume. Thank you.

However…I must deliver some very disheartening news.

I've started to run out of material for the Kino series.

I've been doing my best writing this far, but…I can't go on any longer.

I can't think of any more…

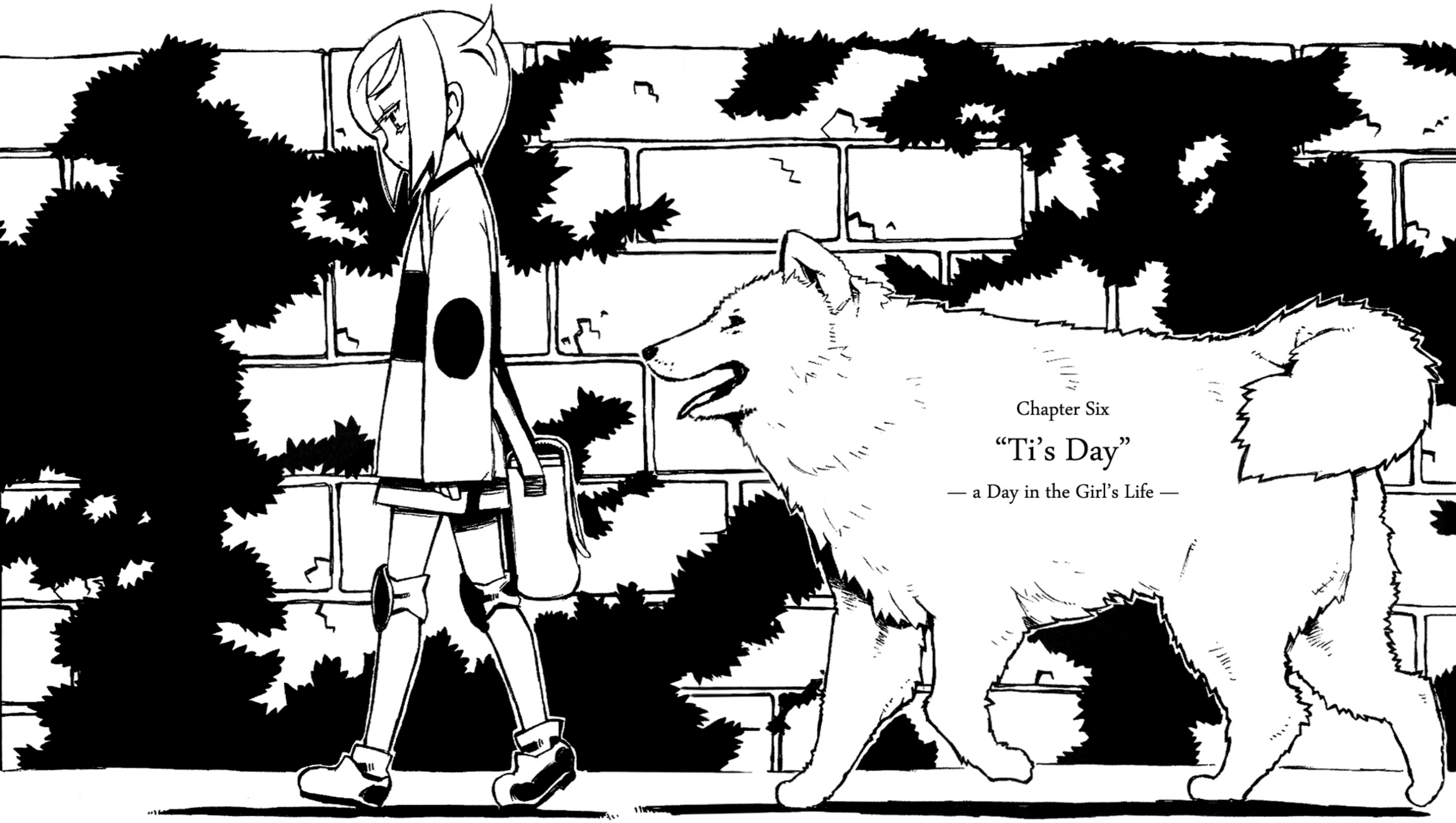
Interesting afterwords!

October 2006

Keiichi Sigsawa, the Afterword Author Who Dreams of the Future

P.S. I'll try my best.

“Ti’s Day” —a Day in the Girl’s Life—



Chapter Six

"Ti's Day"

— a Day in the Girl's Life —

My name is Riku. I am a dog.

I have long, white shaggy fur. My face makes me look like I'm always happy and smiling, but it doesn't mean that I am. I was just born this way.

My master is Shizu. He is a young man who always wears a green sweater, and who has been traveling by buggy ever since he lost his homeland due to complex circumstances.

"I'll leave everything to you then."

Master Shizu set out early that morning, even before the sun has risen. Because the country we have come to this time was rather unstable and the public order pretty bad, he has given up on immigration. However, Master Shizu decided to accept a high-paying job for our traveling expenses. I did not ask him any details about this job, but seeing that he brought his well-maintained

katana with him, it's probably nothing decent. I did not pry.

But more than that, the problem is the white-haired girl who lay face down on the bed even at this hour—Tifana or Ti. During our crossing to this continent, we were caught in various circumstances, and she has become our traveling companion as a result.

"I'm counting on you."

So Master Shizu said, but to tell the truth, I was not too keen on this task.

For the whole day, it will only be Ti and me. Master Shizu is the one who is good in communicating with her. Surely I'm not expected to talk to her?

—

We were inside a room of a cheap hotel, an old decrepit building built in a place quite far from town.

The wallpaper of the room was peeled off all over the place and it was full of cobwebs when we entered it yesterday. The mattresses of the two beds even had holes in them. Right now Ti was sleeping on her own sleeping bag placed on top of a blanket that can't be considered clean by any standard. Her usual grey short pants revealed her stick-thin legs, and on top she was wearing a light brown, long-sleeved round-necked shirt. Even though she has other clothes, this is all she ever wears in her sleeping and waking hours, as long as the temperature would allow it.

It was already late in the morning, halfway till noontime. If only she slept like this until evening, I would have nothing to worry about. But the moment it entered my mind, Ti woke up.

"…"

As quiet as ever, she raised her body as if she was doing a push-up. She stuck her upper body ten centimeters out of the sleeping bag. Then, like a fort's cannon, slowly turned her white head towards the right. That is, towards me, who lay comfortably beside the bed.

Whether she was only sleepy or passing on me her usual silent judgment, her emerald green eyes stared at me for four seconds.

"…"

I rose up and sat beside the bed, then gazed firmly at Ti.

"Good morning."

"…"

"Um, Master Shizu's out to earn some money. If all goes as planned, he will be back late this night. So you will be spending the whole day with me."

"…"

"You understand, don't you? —Gah!"

I was hugged tightly by a Ti charging straight from the bed, and was knocked down to the left. Heavy…

Then she shook my body before abruptly releasing it after a few seconds.

I tried to ask her what that was all about, but since she probably wouldn't answer anyway, I decided to forget about it. When I glanced up, she was looking at me. Then she spoke with a tiny voice.

"G'ning."

And disappeared into the washroom.

It was only after several seconds that I realized that she was telling me 'Good morning'.

Master Shizu left beforehand the croissant he bought last night, as well as a brand new bottle of marmalade.

Ti began eating these for breakfast and lunch. But I was flustered when I saw her scooping out a large portion of the orange marmalade with a big spoon.

It's not a good idea to eat that much all at once. When I said so, Ti looked at the super large serving of marmalade and asked,

"Poison?"

I didn't mean to put it that way.

—

Upon opening the curtains, the clear weather greeted us from outside the window. The early summer morning brought warmth upon the world.

From the window, we could see the geometric patterns formed by the ridges of the cultivated fields, in which grew carrots and whatnot. Visible beyond the scarecrows swaying with the wind was the sideways stretch of grey walls.

Ti leaned on a chair.

"…"

And continued to stare at the scenery for a long time. Meanwhile, I lay comfortably on top of the carpet beside her.

As the window was facing north, the sun's rays were not too intense. Time flowed quietly like this, with no one speaking. And soon it was well past noon.

It would be nice if this day passed peacefully like this. But the moment the thought entered my mind, Ti suddenly got up.

"Going out."

If only the thought did not occur to me.

—

"You can leave that behind, Ti."

There's no need to carry around a grenade with you on a stroll.

"…"

After staring at me for a while, she reluctantly returned the five grenades from her shoulder bag back to Master Shizu's bag. I don't know about casually leaving a grenade in her clothes pocket, but I guess it wouldn't accidentally explode since she wound a tape around the lever. I thought it would be a good idea to do something about Ti's attachment to grenades, but Master Shizu doesn't really pay it any mind.

I proposed that she bring a bottle of water with her. Ti obediently followed, filling a plastic flask with water. She wrapped it in a towel and put it inside the bag.

And finally Ti slung the bag on her shoulder. Clutching the key bearing Master Shizu's memo: 'Don't forget when you go out,' she approached the door.

When I followed her from behind, I noticed a very faint scent of oil from the bag.

"Ti, what did you put at the bottom of your bag?"

Ti took out a metal baton-like object.

"You can also leave that behind," I said.

There's no need to take a ballistic knife with you on a stroll.

—

"…"

"Little lady, I won't understand you if you just stare. What do you need?"

Having grown tired of Ti's stare, the middle-aged man seated in a tall chair behind the front desk who first looked back to us with a start from his magazine reading, asked. From behind, I told Ti that she had to hand over the key since we're going out.

"…"

Without a word, she put the key on top of the table with a clunk.

"Ah, going for a walk, eh? Have a good time."

"…"

But even after that, Ti continued to stare. And stared some more.

"Is there something else?" The man asked, again becoming impatient of the long silence. This time, Ti answered.

"Stroll."

"… I know that already."

Just as expected, there was nothing but fields outside. From time to time, trucks passed on the paved road that

was full of cracks. Both sides of the road were lined up with fields. And until the walls there was nothing but fields.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"…"

Silently, Ti headed to the direction of the walls, walking on the road headed northeast with the sun at her back. As she proceeded speedily, I followed.

When the road turned slightly to the right, it became clear that we have no particular destination, just as I suspected.

"The end."

Ti said all of a sudden, and stopped on her tracks. When I asked 'Of what?' Ti gazed at her feet and tapped the ground with the tip of her shoes several times. Eventually, Ti's shadow fell on the side of the road, on the grass-filled slopes of the fields, and became blurry and indistinguishable.

"Are you by any chance stomping on your own shadow?" I asked, and Ti looked at me and nodded.

"Shadow. Dark."

"Well, that's true, but…"

"Gone."

"I can see that…"

"But it's okay."

"Ah, is that so…?"

"It's okay now."

"…"

"It's okay."

I don't get it.

Ti turned back and retraced our steps, and walked beyond the hotel entrance.

The fields continued for a while up to the end of the road, and soon houses began to appear one after another. At the end of it, that is at the circular center of the country, a random ensemble of tower-like buildings could be seen rising above the urban area, which to my knowledge, has a rather bad public order.

We'd better not go that way. When I told her this,

"…"

Still quiet, Ti sat down on an old, neglected bench by the roadside. It probably used to be a bus stop. Only the round, concrete base of the signboard remained intact.

As Ti seated herself, I also settled by her side. The urban area was right before us. From time to time, Ti would take a gulp of water from her flask, and would also allow me to have a sip.

And until the evening rays of the sun dyed the sky, she patiently sat and gazed at the town. I don't know

what she finds enjoyable in it, but she just continued to look ahead.

And when the sun was almost invisible beyond the walls, and the moment the sky became dim, a light shone upon the group of buildings, illuminating them all at once. It was different from the glows that leaked one by one from the tiny windows. The buildings were floodlit by an intense light that seems to be advertising their existence. It's probably some huge kind of spotlight.

A group of brightly lit buildings—I have no idea at all how she knew about this, and just when I thought how strange the country was,

"…"

Ti stood up and began walking towards the hotel. It's about time for us to go home. I was finally relieved that our little walk culminated with no trouble. Ti, who was quite talkative today, mumbled once more.

"Different."

Again, I don't get it.

We got back into the hotel before it became dark.

"Here you go."

We received our key back and returned to our room. On another note, there were no other customers besides us. Just when I was worrying how this hotel could keep up their business, I noticed the agricultural calendar on the wall and noted that people could be staying here during the busy farming season.

Dinner was croissant and marmalade again. Ti smeared plenty of marmalade on top of the halved croissant.

"…"

And silently handed it to me. While I was overcome with confusion, the marmalade began to drip.

"Oops!"

I caught it in the air, accepted the croissant and started to chew on it.

"Thank you."

I thanked her, and Ti looked down at me, not showing a smile.

"Friend?"

"What? —Um, I guess so. Even if Master Shizu's not here at the moment, we're all traveling buddies."

"Good."

"Yes."

"No problem."

"Yes…?"

This day is filled with things I don't understand.

Late that night, Master Shizu returned in the buggy. Just like that morning, Ti was already asleep, lying face down on her bed.

I welcomed the rather worn-out Master Shizu. He came into the room with both arms around a box about thirty centimeters wide and one meter long. Its lid was tied with a string.

Master Shizu quietly laid the box on the floor. When I asked him what's in it, Master Shizu, now seated on a chair, answered somewhat awkwardly.

"That's my reward for today's work."

Reward? Master Shizu confirmed that Ti was asleep,

"I was asked by this country's police to assist in obliterating a crime organization's hideout. I was supposed to get money in return, but things suddenly changed when it's over. I ended up being given some of the supplies that was confiscated from the hideout. Just as they say, problems exist in the police force of a country with problems."

"I see. So what did they give you?"

"It's…something that would probably be useful to us. There was nothing else but this."

Master Shizu opened the lid of the box. Inside,

"What is this?"

It was more or less seventy centimeters in length. At a glance, one could tell that it was a persuader (Note: A gun). It has a stock that goes on top of the shoulders, a trigger, and an oddly thick barrel.

"It's a 'grenade launcher'."

"A persuader?"

"Kind of. Because it has a thick barrel, it's used exclusively for shooting out grenades."

"… And will you be using that, Master Shizu?"

"No, I thought maybe I could give it to Ti. It seems she liked grenades a lot, but she's not too good at throwing them."

"…"

"Better than nothing, right?"

—

Master Shizu ate what was left of the croissant, and after taking a breather,

"How's today?"

First I answered that we were safe, and that Ti talked more than usual, then I told him about the stuff that I did not understand.

"…Heh," Master Shizu looked surprised. "That's interesting. —It's the first time for the two of you to be alone together for a whole day, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"And so Ti probably thought she had to behave herself ."

"Really? —Well, indeed I may not have seemed too reliable because I am a dog…"

"I am very well aware of how dependable you are, Riku. But maybe Ti did not know that. —It just amuses me how she tried to demonstrate leadership between the two of you."

"Well, it's not like I wasn't happy that she sees me as part of the team."

"What do you mean?"

"I almost begged Kino to kill Ti in order to save you, Master Shizu."

"Don't dwell on it. We have avoided the worst."

"I doubted that Ti considered someone like me a friend."

"I think she does. I believe Ti thinks about a lot of things more than we think she does."

"Really…? I'm afraid to say I don't quite understand."

"For instance, I think there might be some meaning behind her strange actions today."

"Oh… How so?"

"First, as soon as I heard you say that she stomped on her shadow until it was gone, I thought Ti was trying to recognize anew the fact that those people in black that she lived with back in that country were gone. And that she stays strong in spite of it. That she's 'okay'."

"Isn't that a bit…far-fetched?"

"Maybe, but then there was that group of buildings at the country center. While observing them, Ti thought that those buildings at the center were like the Tower. But when they were lit up, she realized that they are ' different' from the Tower she knew, which always remained dark."

"…"

"And during dinner… Wasn't that Ti's way of sharing her food with a friend? That makes me believe that you and Ti got along really well today."

"…"

I didn't say anything and kept silent, just like Ti.

"But maybe I was just overthinking things."

Master Shizu said with a shrug of his shoulders and laughed.

—

The next morning.

We were in the buggy outside the walls.

The weather was good. A green meadow spanned the entire surface ahead of the perfectly straight road.

"Shall we go then?" Master Shizu said in the driver's seat while fixing his goggles.

"Yup," Ti said on passenger seat as she stroked my head.

"Let's go," I said while settled between Ti's legs and my head being stroked.

Then Ti embraced my head and spoke as she rubbed her cheeks on it.

"Yup. Let's go together. Riku's a friend."

My name is Riku. I am a dog.

My face makes me look as if I'm always happy and smiling. But it doesn't mean that I am. I was just born this way.

But right now, I am happy and smiling.

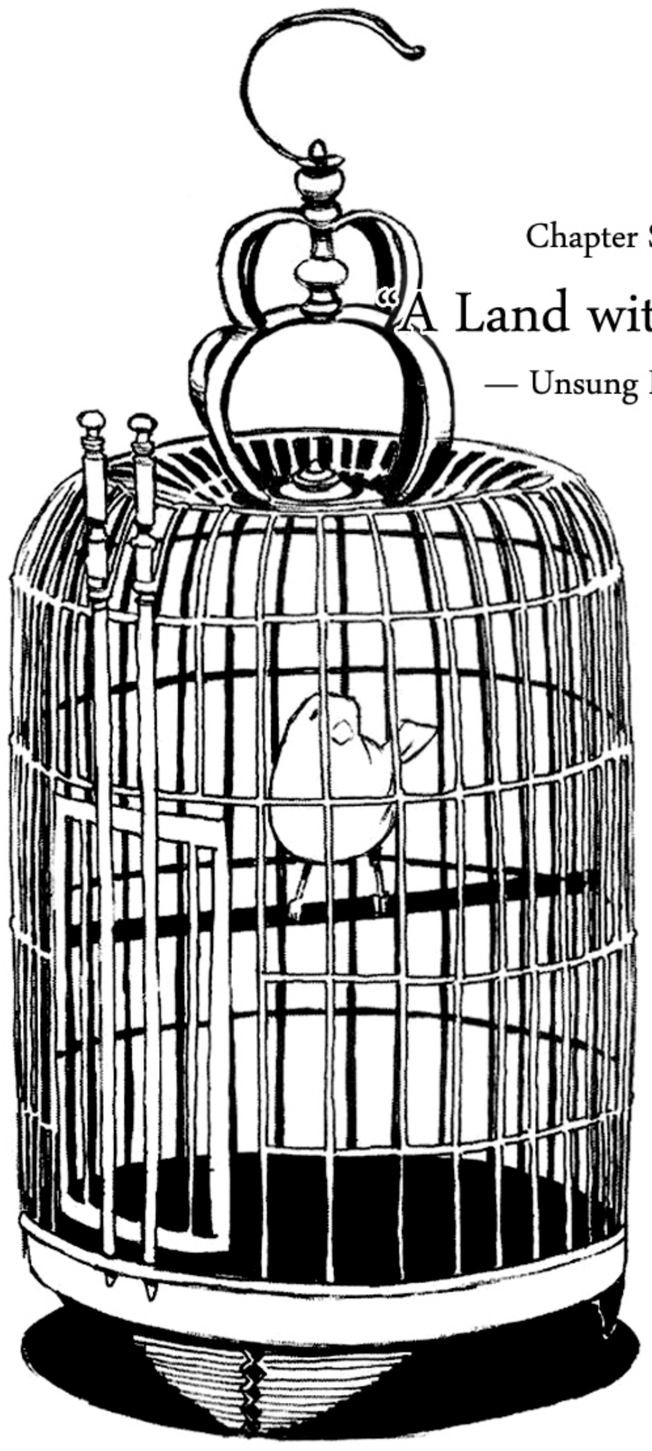
Shizu is my Master. He is a young man who always wears a green sweater, and had been traveling by buggy ever since he lost his homeland due to complex circumstances.

Another fellow traveler is Ti, a quiet girl with a fondness for grenades, and who has become part of the team ever since she lost her homeland due to complex circumstances.

The buggy took off.

“A Land with a Diva” —Unsung Divas—

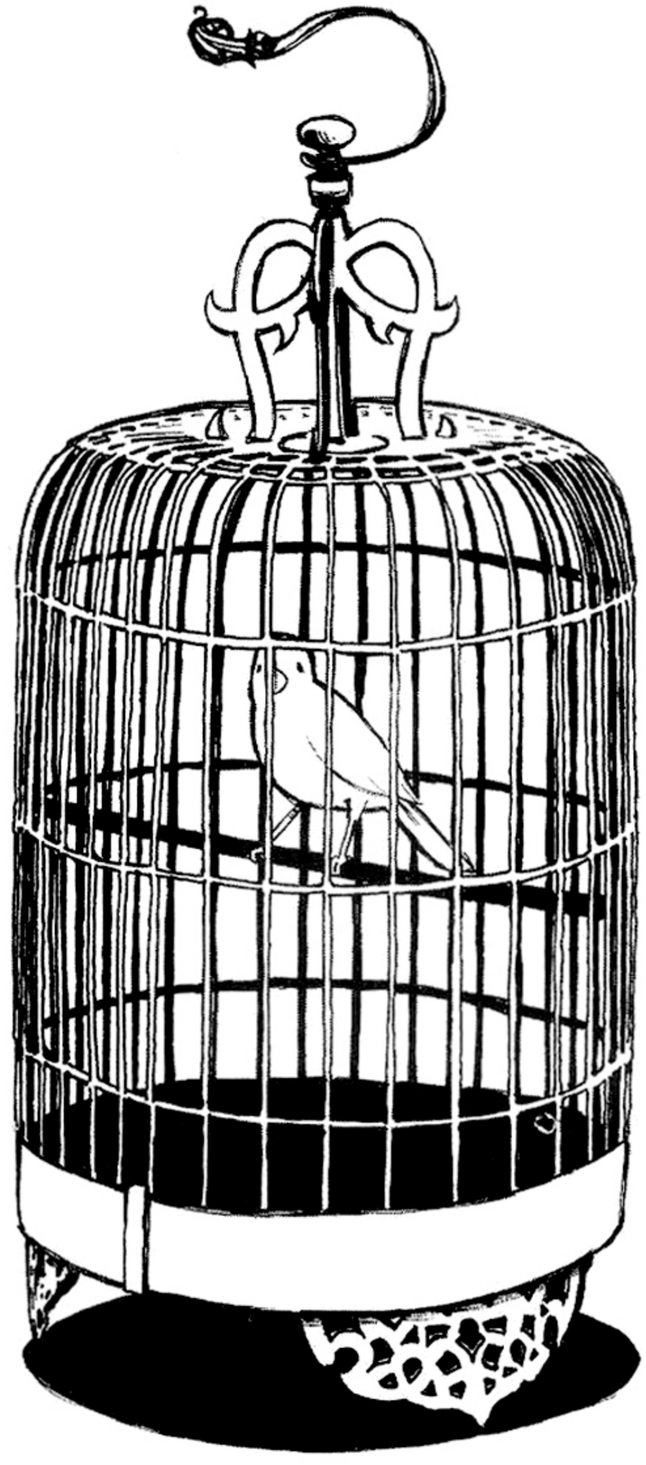
Translated by Untuned-Strings here

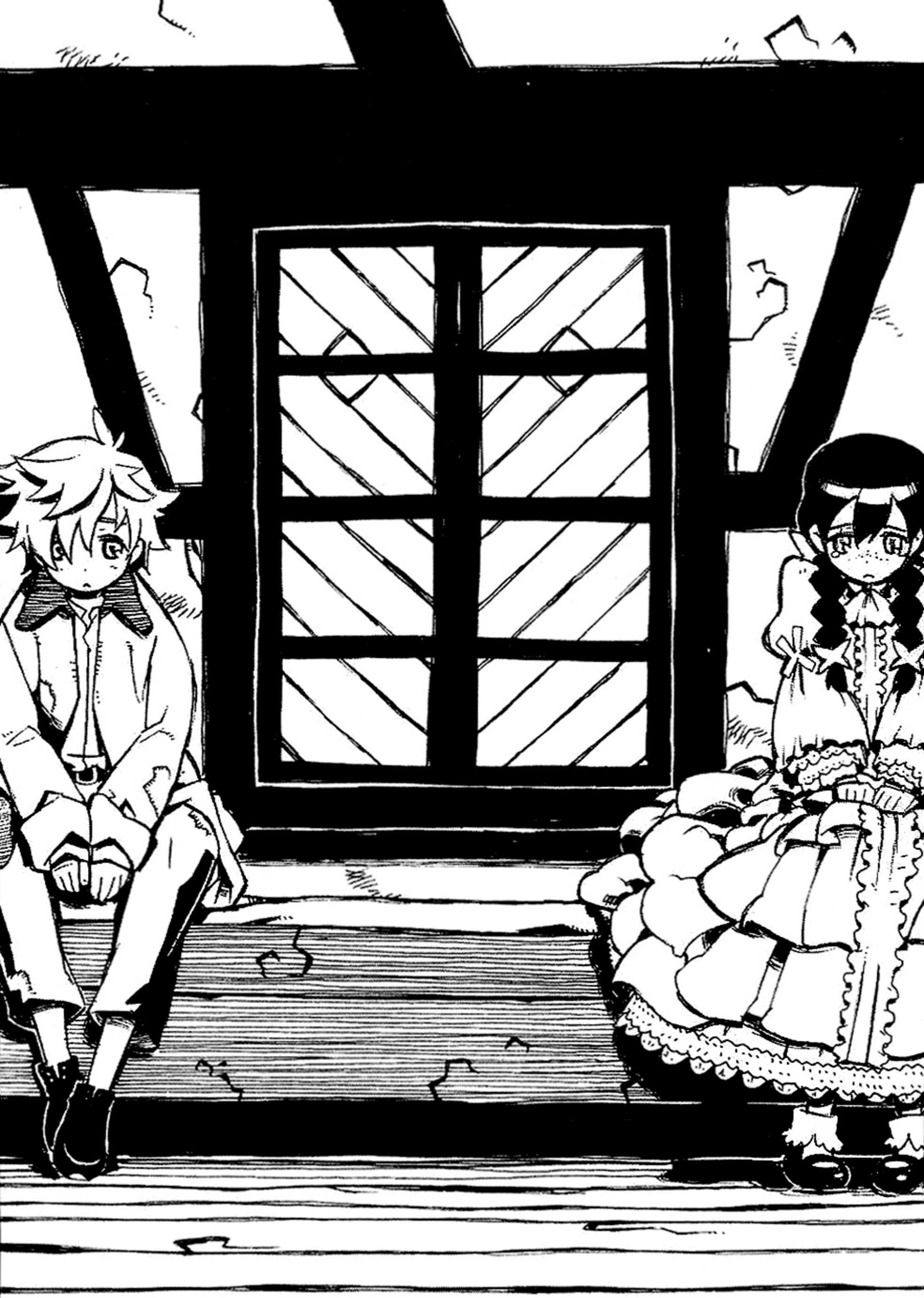


Chapter Seven

"A Land with a Diva"

— Unsung Divas —



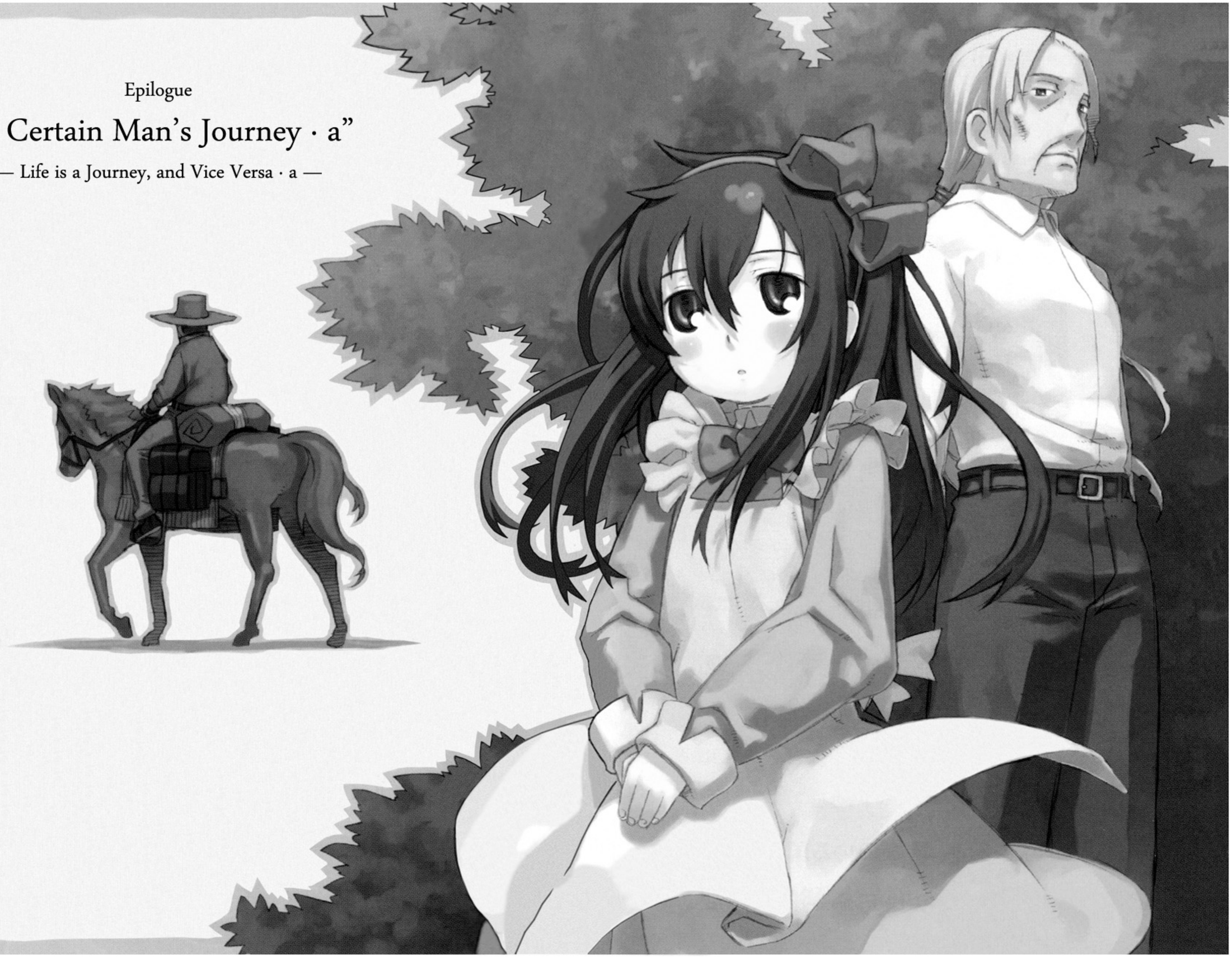


“A Certain Man’s Journey · a” —Life is a Journey, and Vice Versa. · a—

Epilogue

“A Certain Man’s Journey · a”

— Life is a Journey, and Vice Versa · a —



A long time ago, when Kino still lived with the old lady she called Master.

When her hair was still long.

One clear day, a man on horseback came to the log cabin.

He had a beard, a worn leather jacket, a ten-gallon hat, and a worn revolver-rifle on his back. He looked over fifty years of age.

He happened to pass by the forest road and greeted Kino and the old lady, who were on the deck, hanging up sheets to dry. Then he asked if they could bear to part with some water and fodder.

The old lady replied genially and Kino filled up the horse.

They invited the man to tea on the cabin deck. And a little tea party between three people began.

“Wow. Did you really travel for that long?”

So asked a deeply interested Kino upon hearing the man’s story.

He said he had traveled upwards of thirty years. He went by many means—bicycles in technologically-advanced countries, camels in deserts, horses in grass-rich meadows, skiing in cold places, and even with his own two feet, depending on the location.

“I have a goal, see.”

Now that he said it, Kino asked what it could be.

“By traveling…”

The man began.

"I hope to rid this world of 'gravity'."

"Gravity? Is that the thing that explains why things fall when you let them go?"

"That's right. Where I grew up, people lived above and under mountains as tall as towers. So there were times when people fell. My family, for instance. On the way home, a leg slipped, and everyone but I went up to God."

He narrowed his eyes and continued.

"Therefore, I thought that gravity had to be gone from this world for everyone to live happily. But I couldn't think of how to do that. I left home to find people who would know, and here I am, traveling."

The man asked the old lady if perhaps she knew the method.

She set down her cup and shook her head.

But the man did not show a flicker of disappointment.

"I've went to many countries, but I still haven't found anyone who knows how. There were some who told me I was hoping for the impossible. But I won't give up. I'll keep on looking until I die. I believe that the day will come when I find out and go home with a smile."